

Getting a grip on infrastructure costs

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Hong Kong spends some HK\$80 billion each year building infrastructure that includes highways, drainage and other municipal services.

Together with projects from the private sector, the total annual construction output can exceed HK\$300 billion.

Apart from the heavy workload the construction industry has been facing the challenges of an aging workforce and high construction costs, threatening spending and time overruns.

This is a problem and often face criticism from politicians and citizens.

Although in many cases it could be argued a previously set cost and time budgets may be over-ambitious, most people believe project management and control could be improved to minimize the overruns.

In late 2018, the government proposed the Construction 2.0 initiative that advocates innovation, professionalism and revitalization and provides a roadmap for the industry.

A key driver of the initiative is the Development Bureau's Project Strategy and Governance Office set up in 2019.

Shortly after the office was established it set up the Centre of Excellence for Major Project Leaders to provide high-level training.

One of the center's programs is the Project Delivery Capability Programme that provides systematic training for middle-tier project professionals. It is a collaborative effort between academia, government authorities, industry leaders as well as professional and international organizations.

The core of the program is to equip participants with the necessary mind set, skill set and tool set that are vital to their performances as project managers.

Based on this, the program promotes the project ownership concept that leads to more pro-active, collaborative and cost-conscious mentality in identifying and solving of problems as well as optimizing for better performances.

It also provides contemporary technical knowledge such as Building Information Modelling, Modular Integrated Construction and Design for Manufacturing and Assembly as well as other innovative ideas to improve productivity and buildability.

Moreover, it enhances the skills of participants in managing consultants and contractors and in understanding the whole-life project value and cost.

Another of the center's programs is the Major Projects Leadership Programme delivered by the Said Business School of the University of Oxford. In collaboration with leaders of government authorities and professional organizations it brings world-class practitioners to share experience, and celebrated scholars to conduct case studies, and the participants are key project leaders.

Since the formation of the center over 200 government officials in professional grades have been trained in its programs.

It aims to continue to impart training to all project leaders as they are recruited and promoted. It further aims to extend these training programs gradually to stakeholders outside government service with a view to enhancing the overall performances in works projects.

This center will not only benefit Hong Kong but can be used as a training ground for neighbors, including the Greater Bay Area and some parts of southeast Asia.

Improvement to project management will help us and others, and we must share our knowledge and experience so we can all ensure timely completion of projects within cost budgets.

Veteran engineer Edmund Leung Kwong-ho casts an expert eye over features of modern life